



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

Macedonian leader of global alien smuggling network extradited from Bulgaria

NEW YORK, NY -- Michael J. Garcia, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that Nafi Elezi, a 42-year-old Macedonian citizen, arrived today in the United States as a result of an extradition from Bulgaria to face federal alien smuggling charges.

Elezi is charged in an eight-count indictment returned by a grand jury in the Southern District of New York. The indictment alleges that Elezi participated in a large-scale conspiracy to smuggle aliens into the United States from approximately January 2000 to December 2004, and with obtaining and producing fraudulent European passports as part of that smuggling ring.

The charges against Elezi are the result of a long-term investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that began in 2001.

As alleged in the indictment and as described in previous hearings related to co-defendants, the alien smuggling organization of which Elezi was a leader utilized a complex network of international participants to smuggle hundreds of immigrants from countries in Eastern Europe, such as Albania and Macedonia, into the United States. The aliens paid as much as \$16,000 to the smugglers in order to be brought into the United States.

Typically, the aliens were shuttled to Bulgaria from their native countries by individuals who worked with Elezi. From Bulgaria, the aliens were taken via airplane by Elezi personally, or by others who worked with him, through countries in Western Europe to countries in South America. From South America, Elezi or his accomplices took the aliens to Mexico, where the aliens crossed into the United States through Texas. In addition, Elezi and his accomplices provided fake passports from European countries, such as Belgium and Holland for the aliens to use for travel along the smuggling routes.

Through cooperation with Interpol and Bulgarian law enforcement, Elezi was apprehended at the Macedonian-Bulgarian border on July 19, 2005. Elezi was subsequently ordered extradited to the United States by the Bulgarian court. His subsequent appeal was denied.

Elezi's arrest and extradition from Bulgaria were the result of a cooperative effort between ICE; the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York; the ICE Attaché Office in Vienna, Austria; the Department of State, U.S. Embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria; the Bulgarian Ministry of

Interior, the Bulgarian Ministry of Justice; the Bulgarian Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office; and Interpol.

Elezi faces 80 years imprisonment if convicted of the charges. Mr. Garcia praised the efforts of ICE in investigating this case and of Bulgarian authorities in assisting with Elezi's extradition. Assistant United States Attorney Miriam E. Rocah is in charge of the prosecution.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.